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The "Two Kingdoms" Today¹

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Introduction

The issue of the relationship of church and state, of spiritual and secular, of public world and private life, is one which Christian theological traditions have dealt with in different ways. In the Lutheran tradition a theological approach has evolved which is generally referred to as the *Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*. This doctrine has been singularly unsuccessful and unhelpful in our century: it has variously been described as a "minefield", "excess baggage", a "labyrinth", and "the painful neuralgia of 20th century Lutheranism",² and other uncomplimentary epithets! Trutz Rendtdorff is persuaded that "... the history of the doctrine of two kingdoms is now depicted primarily as a history of its misuse."³

We will look at the historical and theological precedents which led to the development of this doctrine, especially the theology of Luther and its formulation in the Lutheran confessions. We will consider some contemporary critiques of the doctrine. We will highlight several abuses, ambiguous applications, and positive uses of the doctrine. And we will consider its possible value as a tool in understanding how to proclaim Christ in a pluralistic society.

Origins of the Doctrine

The classical source of the doctrine of Two Kingdoms appears in the Augsburg Confession of 1530 in two places: Article XVIII on Civil Government,⁴ and Article XXVIII on the Power of Bishops.⁵ However, the roots of the doctrine go back

to Thomas Aquinas, with his hierarchy of nature and grace, to Augustine's *City of God*, to Paul in Romans 13, and to Jesus in Mark 12:13-17. Thus the doctrine is not specifically Lutheran. But the precise formulation of it as it appears in AC XVIII and AC XXVIII has obvious roots in two of Luther's concerns at the time of the Reformation. AC XVIII wishes to justify the callings of Christian persons at all levels of society, legitimizing the genuine good works of all persons as acceptable to God. The chief concern of AC XXVIII is the limitation of power exercised by the church over secular society, and the establishment of a legitimate area of power which will be safe from the authority of the church. In these formulations, AC XVIII is more successful and balanced than AC XXVIII. The former requires obedience to duly-constituted authorities but recognizes limits to this authority; the latter in its zeal to protect society from the church, opens the possibility of isolating the two authorities and powers from each other.

Although the Augsburg Confession was written by Melancthon, behind its words stands Luther. Luther has often been blamed for the damage done through the abuse of the Two Kingdoms doctrine. However, Luther formulated no doctrine of Two Kingdoms. Rather, he spoke of *two governances*. His points of departure for speaking of the political realm were his theology of secular calling, and his concern to free society from dominion by the church.

According to Luther, the state is God's creation. Its purpose is to protect the world from sin, chaos, and evil. As part of the order of creation, the state is a reality for all persons. In this regard, the state is one of the three orders of creation: *ecclesia*, *politia*, and *oeconomia*. God gave humankind these three orders to help them in the struggle with Satan. God uses the power of these institutions to struggle for justice, uphold order, enforce law, and create peace. Within these three orders, different persons are called to different tasks. Although these three realms are not separated, each has its special realm of responsibility, and therefore has limits. These limits permit the legitimate use of force, but also set boundaries to this force.

All the orders depend on the Word of God, and are the gift and miracle of God's grace. Without the state, it would be impossible to proclaim the gospel; without the church there would be no gospel; without the *oeconomia* there would be

no lawful and constructive activity in society, and no family life. Within the shared realm of these three orders, all persons serve God's will, and in so doing serve one another; there is a graceful unity of purpose and action, which is best described as God's *twofold governance*: law and gospel, spirit and flesh, church and world.

Hence the state is not a matter of indifference to Christians. They are called to assess the limits of the state, distinguish its areas of authority and competence, and discern when idolatry has set in. The state has realistic limits which can only be perceived from outside, by the church, through the Word of God. The fact that God exercises twofold governance does not mean that either order, church or state, is beyond the law of God or autonomous. So, those who hold public office, whether as princes, magistrates or parents, are doing God's business, which is love and justice. All persons, whether in church, state, or *oeconomia*, exercise a divine calling of service.

For Luther, it was not the *orders* themselves which were important, but those who occupied the offices. God does not work in the orders, but through the people and fellowship within them, that is, princes, magistrates, soldiers, parents, families, and congregations. For each office and person there are duties and limits to authority and to public obedience. Therefore, just as each person is constrained to obey the authorities when they exercise legitimate authority, so also when these authorities exceed their limitations each person is to recognize that the limits have been passed, and work to change the society or order. But Luther would not condone rebellion. Only another prince, one who legitimately holds public office, would have the responsibility of disciplining and disempowering another prince who had exceeded authority.

In his discussion of the orders of creation and God's struggle with evil, Luther uses the Pauline concepts of *spirit* and *flesh*. It is here that confusion begins to arise. For Luther, the *spiritual* and *inner* refer not to the human spirit or soul, but to the total human being from the perspective of faith. Conversely, the *flesh* and the *outer* refer to the *old person*, the total human being under the power of sin. When Luther uses these terms, he refers to the Kingdom of God versus the realm of Satan, the struggle of God with evil. Although this appears dualistic, Luther actually means the twofold way in which God

works in the world. The error made later was to confuse the struggle between God and Satan with the two "Kingdoms" of church and state/economy.

Later Developments in Lutheranism

Lutheran orthodoxy soon developed a less graceful and flexible view of the three estates. The church became just one part of the created order of *ecclesia/politia/oeconomia*, and eventually was completely integrated into the state. Gradually these institutional structures came to be taken for granted uncritically, and of course this was vigorously promoted by Renaissance rulers of all faiths. It was to their advantage to have the voice of the church either silenced or in complicity with their goals. As time went on, this so-called Doctrine of Two Kingdoms was used to justify disengagement of Christian faith from political responsibility, indifference to political abuse and suffering, and to confine Christian activity to the private life of the spirit.

No clearly-articulated doctrine of Two Kingdoms emerged, however, until the late 19th century. The term "Two Kingdoms" is first recorded in 1867 by a certain Christoph Ernst Luthardt,⁶ who was able to crystallize and raise to consciousness this concept which had been implicitly held for centuries. There were two spheres of life, Luthardt said, personal and public, spiritual and carnal, inner and outer, personal and civic, heart and reason. Christianity was restricted only to the personal and inner realm. Here was to be found true freedom. The true church is a spiritual community of individuals.

Little more was heard of this doctrine until the 1930s, when it was used by the so-called "German Christians" to justify their support for National Socialism in Germany. At the same time, some Lutherans began to question it, going behind the received doctrine to Luther and the Augsburg Confession, in an attempt to recover the true and original meaning. Major debates developed in Denmark, Norway, and within international Lutheranism, where Americans and Swedes challenged the reigning German theologians. The pattern in various Lutheran territories since that time has been that the Two Kingdoms doctrine acts as an implicit and unreflective muzzle on the church until there is a political crisis which threatens

the self-interest of the church, or one of its minorities. Then, hard theological reflection begins, and can go either way.

Most Lutherans still cling to some sort of unreflective, unarticulated, and dualistic doctrine of Two Kingdoms, as long as it is in their self-interest. This prevails just as much in "liberal" societies, where the realms of science, technology, culture and civil religion are deemed autonomous and unchallengeable, as it does in totalitarian and oppressive societies where the state is regarded as unassailable.

Critiques of Luther

Some have gone back to lay the blame for abuses of this doctrine at the feet of Luther himself. These range from Troeltsch and Reinhold Niebuhr, who "... saw in Luther a regressive defender of the medieval state, tolerating injustice and demanding feudal obedience, especially in the peasant rebellion of 1525."⁷ There are also less extreme and more balanced criticisms.

Karl Barth saw the problem in Luther's extreme separation of Law and Gospel, which created, he said, a false dualism within God. This encouraged and fostered an implicit German Paganism. His criticism is expressed in the *Barmen Declaration*, which bears Barth's imprint (and was also signed by Lutherans such as Bonhoeffer and Niemöller). Its *Second Thesis* challenges the political autonomy and church quietism which had developed through the influence of the Two Kingdoms doctrine.

As Jesus Christ is God's declaration of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness, he is God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him we obtain joyful deliverance from the godless bondage of this world for the free, grateful service of his creatures. We reject the false doctrine that there are areas of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ but to other masters, realms where we do not need to be justified and sanctified by him.⁸

This declaration questions the belief that there are areas of life not under the rule of Christ. It suggests that when anything is withdrawn from the Lordship of Christ, it inevitably leads to idolatry.

Use of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine in the Twentieth Century

There have been a number of situations in which Two Kingdoms doctrine has played a part in justifying political decisions. Some of these instances represent abuses of the doctrine, some represent successful uses, and some are mixed.

1. *Nazi Germany* (abuse): Shortly after the Nazi seizure of power in Germany in 1933, many Lutheran pastors, so-called "German Christians", gave their allegiance to the new Reich, using Two Kingdoms doctrine to justify their actions: the public realm was left to the Führer, with the church in charge of the spiritual realm. The "German Christians" divided life into two separate, autonomous realms, and saw no contradiction between unconditional allegiance to the gospel and to the Nazi state. The Nazis used the traditional theology of autonomous orders and its consequence of political noninvolvement by the church, to bind the church and silence its ethical voice. This was possible largely because of the close state-church relations fostered between rulers and the territorial churches in Germany since the Reformation. It also reflects the traditional trust which the church had in its political rulers.

Brazil (abuse): Brazil has had a large German population, mainly Lutheran in background, since the early 19th century. Until 1880, the Roman Church was Brazil's official church, and no other religious bodies were recognized. In 1880, Germans, along with other groups, gained full citizenship and religious freedom. However, this democratic trend was reversed in the revolution of 1930, which brought a return to the hegemony of the Roman Church and a loss of religious rights to others.

The Brazilian Lutheran Church of about 750,000 was heavily dependent on the German territorial churches and their foreign departments until 1939. Brazilian Lutherans have seen themselves as a folk church, in which Germanness and the gospel were identified closely. It was also deeply influenced by German politics. It has been estimated that in 1935, about 75% of Brazilian Lutheran pastors were members of the Nazi party.

There has always been an implicit belief among Brazilian Lutherans in the autonomy of church and state. Lutherans took a stance of non-involvement in politics. Christianity was

a private sphere, the place to foster their ethnic heritage, preserve their language, and to minister to the needs of the poor within the immigrant community.

During the 1960s, some political maturity began to develop, especially among a younger generation of pastors who began to interact with Brazilian society. However, with the *coup* of 1964 and the oppression which followed, most Lutheran activists were either detained or driven back into their traditional dualistic quietism. The situation was further confused by the nomination in 1973 of General Ernesto Geisel, a Lutheran, to the presidency of Brazil. In 1970, an Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation originally planned for Brazil was moved to France to protest the political situation in Brazil. Most Brazilian Lutherans did not understand the reason or necessity for this action. Most still cling to a traditional Two Kingdoms doctrine, supporting the state uncritically and satisfying themselves with an autonomous folk religion.

3. *Norway* (positive): For centuries, church and state in Norway have been closely and unreflectively tied together. In 1940 Nazi troops occupied Norway. The Norwegian government resigned and the king fled to England: consequently, there was no legitimate government. In 1942, as an act of protest against the Nazi puppet government, all the bishops, 93% of the clergy and both theological faculties, resigned. For the next four years the church, formerly a state church, became a self-governing folk-church. Its leader, Bishop Eivind Bergraav, did not hesitate to protest. Emphasizing the tradition of resistance which he found in Luther and AC XVIII, he recognized the need to challenge the legitimacy of the German puppet government.

Bergraav recognized the conditional nature of the state. According to Romans 13, he affirmed, the law stands between the individual person and the state. In a pastoral letter of February 1941 he wrote, "As the Confession indicates, the church stands in a definite relationship to the just state. This presupposes that the state, through its constituent bodies, maintains law and justice, both of them God-given orders."⁹ It is the responsibility of the church, he affirmed, to judge the legality of the state and its actions.

4. *Hungary* (positive): After the collapse of the Nazi Reich, Hungary entered the orbit of the Communist bloc. Gradually

from the ruins of the former regime a socialist state emerged. The small Lutheran Church of Hungary was faced with three options: accommodation to the state, opposition to the state, or abandonment of political responsibility and withdrawal from political life. Hungarian Lutherans concluded that "Marxists and atheists alike are able to provide a government that is good and that serves the common good."¹⁰ Zoltan Kaldy, president of Hungary's Lutherans in the 1970s, has said,

We have experienced for ourselves that in our form of government the vocation of the state, which we have described on the basis of Holy Scripture, functions effectively (in other words, the state does promote a just social order). For that reason it became obvious that there is no reason for us to refuse the due obedience of citizens or to go into opposition.¹¹

The Hungarian Lutherans adopted what they called a "diaconal theology and lifestyle". This is described as follows:

The proper attitude for the church to take in this world is to represent Jesus Christ, who although he is Lord, dwells among us "like a servant". Here we must stress that the church is to provide such diaconal service not only to "the neighbour" but also to communities, that is, to society as a whole, even to all humanity.¹²

5. *South Africa* (mixed): The Lutheran Church in South Africa began as a mission of Germans and Scandinavians to African blacks. Although separate institutions were never maintained, there was always a clear distinction between Europeans and Africans. Lutheran missionaries, of course, gave allegiance to the Afrikaans governing authorities. In 1957, as the government began to plan for separate development of the races (apartheid), it quietly but officially approached all churches to indicate that soon the races would be expected to worship, learn, and enjoy fellowship separately. The Roman, Anglican, and even some Dutch Reformed churches immediately protested this; the Lutherans had difficulty in protesting this government policy.

By the mid-1960s this had changed. Except for churches dominated by conservative German missionaries and settlers, protest against the policy of parallel development was strong among Lutherans; so was the affirmation that Christians had the right to resist state injustice. Apartheid, they affirmed, was not binding according to Romans 13.

A Lutheran gathering met at Umpumolo in 1967 to discuss the Doctrine of Two Kingdoms in its reformation setting as

applicable to the South African situation. Its conclusion was that the church cannot be confined to the spiritual realm, and that separate development was rejected. Some white Lutheran groups rejected this conclusion, affirming that the church must still restrict itself to the spiritual sphere alone. However, they were in a minority.

6. *Denmark* (mixed): Unlike Norway, when German forces occupied Denmark in 1940, the Danish king and parliament remained. The church, which had never before had to reflect on its relationship to the state, was placed in an ambiguous position. Initially the "compromise" position of the king and parliament led the church to follow suit, respecting the legally constituted authorities and even overlooking early violations of civil rights. There was protest within the church, but it developed very slowly, and although not punished, it was not encouraged by the bishops. They took the route of issuing pastoral letters to their parishes criticizing government actions and policies. Hence they retained the fiction of the separation of church and state. However, the genuine protests of pastors like Kaj Munck, murdered by the Nazis while in custody in January 1944, placed in proper perspective the bondage in which the church had allowed itself to be kept.

Only after the resignation of the Danish parliament in 1943 was the church "free" to protest the occupation. This protest was also fuelled by the increasing persecution of Danish Jews who had always held a place of respect in Danish society. However, beyond this the protest of the Danish church appears to have been motivated mainly by self-interest.

7. *Namibia* (mixed): As in South Africa, German missionaries in Namibia used the doctrine of Two Kingdoms to legitimize their mission and secure their position as Europeans over against the black population. White immigrant churches tended to see themselves as culturally superior to the black churches, although no clear separation of the races such as apartheid followed the South African mandate after World War I. The missionaries and German churches maintained the mantle of "neutrality", which made it impossible for them to criticize the spreading racism introduced from South Africa, and also prevented them from achieving any solidarity with black Lutherans. This doctrine of Two Kingdoms was not explicit,

but took the form of non-involvement, quietism, and folk religion, which left the governing up to the governors.

However, in 1971 two large black Lutheran churches joined in drafting an Open Letter to then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd of South Africa. They accused his government of failing to take cognizance of human rights with respect to the non-white population. A struggle then developed between the black churches and the white churches: the white churches generally accepted the validity of the points made by the black churches, but disassociated themselves from their political implications. In contrast to this misuse of the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, the black Lutherans have used it in a positive way, affirming that in fact *their* people are the heirs of legitimate rule in Namibia.

The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in Contemporary Thought

Do we need a doctrine of Two Kingdoms or two governances in the church today? Has this tradition anything to offer the churches? There appear to be three options in dealing with this political tradition: abandon the doctrine entirely; accept it essentially as it has been received; recast it by amending or adapting it in light of contemporary wisdom. The first option needs no further consideration. Those who abandon this tradition will look for their political wisdom elsewhere. The latter two options bear consideration and indeed have been examined by theologians in our time. We will summarize several attempts to accept and recast the doctrine.

John Stumme affirms the ongoing value of the Two Kingdoms doctrine in the traditional sense. He calls it "... a classical theological response to the question how one should understand God's action and Christian existence in light of the Gospel."¹³ Stumme affirms that the doctrine is "... necessary to safeguard the eschatological and soteriological reality made present for us in the gift of faith in the Gospel of Christ."¹⁴ The Two Kingdoms describe the world with and without Christ. Where Christ is not present, the devil reigns. Where Christ rules, God is able to liberate persons from the kingdom of the world.

This doctrine does not imply autonomy, exclusiveness, or separation. Rather it defends us from "... messianization of

politics and the pretension of self-redemption",¹⁵ enlightenment ideologies which still threaten us today. There will always be Christians who want to synthesize the Kingdom of Christ with the powers and ideologies of this world, and those in the world who will encourage them! Politics has its limits, and this doctrine defines them. This safeguard, Stumme suggests, is missing in most versions of liberation theology, where politics and love, ethics and salvation, are drawn too closely together.

Politics today, he believes, should be seen as part of God's creating work. He likes to contrast the duality and autonomy implied in the term *Two Kingdoms* with the diversity implied in Luther's phrase *two governances*, which simply refers to the two ways in which God governs the world and struggles against evil. "Christians live in two regimes and are subject to God in both, which are not to be confused or separated."¹⁶ This provides an alternative to a dualistic concept of salvation, which says that faith removes one from an evil world; and it is an alternative to an inflated concept of salvation which sees God's saving work as including all human good, and which sees the political accomplishments of liberation as part of salvation.

Trutz Rendtdorff addresses the question, "How is the political realm to be regarded?" He observes the underlying mistrust that many traditional Lutherans have of programs based on the idea that the church can fulfill its mission by working to change social and political structures. This, he says, is not quietism, but

... arises from the conviction that political activity has a dignity all its own, a theological justification of its own which does not depend on the condescending cooperation of the churches or of individual Christians... such cooperation is meaningful and significant only because secular political activity exists in its own right – as *regnum mundi*.¹⁷

He suggests that this concern for the integrity of political life corresponds to what was formerly intended by the doctrine of Two Kingdoms. In seeking to try to distinguish between these two realms today, "... the meaning of a distinction between God's activity in the arena of political events and God's activity on behalf of human salvation must be made absolutely clear, over against the claim of political activity to dominate every sphere of life."¹⁸

Political activity, he suggests, can only *preserve* the world: it cannot bring about redemption. Political activity cannot create more humanity in human beings: it can only work to conserve what is already there. Through political activity, God shapes and preserves the world. This occurs through the administration of life's opportunities — material good, facilities, as well as rights and ordinances for human existence. But life itself is never produced through political activity, which only preserves and protects.

For political activity to *give* life means, in fact, to *protect* life in all its personal uniqueness, as it already exists. Political activity provides for continuity in life, but it is not the lord of life... The strictly anti-hierarchical notion that all secular offices and activities are of equal value in the sight of God... has the following intent: to demonstrate that the value of social activity consists in its function of preserving life-in-community.¹⁹

Rendtdorff is making an important point. He also observes that these two realms do not operate in isolation. There is, he says, a theological dimension to all political questions, just as there is a political dimension to all theological questions. Only when this point is realized can one begin to understand the distinction between the two types of activity, political and theological. Recognizing this, he can claim that "political activity is always confronted by the question of truth".²⁰

However, he claims that the truth which concerns politics is always and only *accepted* truth, not *absolute* truth. Politics works within the circle of ideas and truths proposed by those involved in the debate. "Consequently, in the political and social sphere truth takes the form of consensus."²¹ This accounts for the "secularity" of political truth, its lack of prophetic edge, and also represents the boundaries of its legitimacy. This also suggests that the truth which theology knows, falls outside this boundary and is available to judge politics, its claims being, in a sense, unlimited and absolute. In this formulation of the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, the political sphere is not abandoned, but certain essential matters about the role of truth in political life are taken up by theology.

Robert Benne and Carl Braaten see two separate dilemmas in the doctrine of Two Kingdoms. The church needs freedom from the state, but also insists on interfering prophetically with the state. Operating from an American perspective,

they see parallels between the doctrine of Two Kingdoms and the American doctrine of separation of church and state. The dilemma for the conscientious Christian is that there is no middle ground, no "demilitarized zone".

The church holds the state accountable to God and seems to be a self-appointed watchdog on how government abuses power. The church does and must interfere with what secular authorities are doing. The basis of this seeming meddling is the law of God. . . . The church is called to proclaim the whole counsel of God, and that means both law and gospel, both the ways in which God is working in the world.²²

This, they suggest, is why John the Baptist lost his head. The church has always had this unpleasant job of risking itself to remind the state of God's judgment against political crimes and social sins.

They recommend trying to hold the Two Kingdoms doctrine in a way that neither confuses nor separates the kingdoms. Theology can perform a useful service by making the proper distinctions here. Neither complete separation nor complete removal of the distinctions will help.

Roy J. Enquist calls for a critical re-examination of the tradition. At the heart of the doctrine, he claims, is the twofold rule of God in the world, which calls us to address with the Gospel matters of social, political, and cultural import. Enquist brings liberation theology, especially its idea of solidarity with the oppressed, into connection with the doctrine of Two Kingdoms. Both, he says, share Luther's idea that God speaks law and judgment as well as gospel and forgiveness.

In abuses of Two Kingdoms doctrine, God's Word is withdrawn from the public realm. Again by emphasizing law and gospel, Enquist tries to re-introduce God's word into Two Kingdoms thinking, pointing out that God uses two strategies to combat sin: law and gospel. He links this not just to Luther, but also to Paul (Romans 13), Augustine (The Two Cities), Aquinas (the hierarchy of nature and grace), and Bonhoeffer (ultimate and penultimate ethics). These two realms of God's action are not exclusive or autonomous, but rather parallel strategies for resisting sin and evil.

Enquist also reminds us that the two realms are not in conflict always. God and Satan are not friends; their realms do not coexist peacefully. But this is a different dualism from the

distinction between church and state. These two realms are *not* opposed; for God is in, with, and under both of them. However, neither are they always in harmony. Each realm is *simul justus et peccator*, at once justified servant and rebellious sinner. He suggests that one may use the concept of eschatological hope to anticipate God's judgment over our abuses of the Two Kingdoms doctrine. As one looks at the confusing array of opinions and forces around us we need to ask, "Where is God's rule in all this?... We need to ask how our awareness of God's twofold rule can illumine our future agenda."²³

Thomas W. Streiter claims that Luther has been radically misrepresented. Luther, he believes, in fact allowed and encouraged civil disobedience and political participation. He says that Luther claims Christians cannot avoid social responsibility. Something like the Two Kingdoms doctrine is essential for Christian thinking. "I know of no major Christian tradition that operates without some version of the two kingdoms, although proponents of other traditions may be defensive about this assertion, use different terms for it, and apply it in decidedly different ways."²⁴ Affirming that there are biblical and theological elements behind the Two Kingdoms doctrine and twofold governances concept which are a universal basis for dialogue, Streiter outlines three approaches or scenarios which one can use to analyze political situations and their sensitivity to criticism and change:

1. *A Critical/Constructive Scenario*, where the powers that be are trying to achieve justice.
2. *A Critical/Transformative Scenario*, where the powers that be may err, but are responsive to criticism.
3. *A Critically/Resistive Scenario*, where the powers that be are responsible for injustice, and are not responsive to criticism.

Streiter advocates a proactive resistance model for change. We are called to cooperate with God, he says, in resisting evil. In the struggle between good and evil, we must enter the struggle with more than words.

Luther's model of two kingdoms and twofold governances is a proactive resistance model by which we, as cooperators with God through grace, are called to be the eschatological people of God in an alienated world filled with errant and demonic forces....Christians and

grace, are called to be the eschatological people of God in an alienated world filled with errant and demonic forces... Christians and the church are called to take the risks of a prophetic resistance, not only toward world structures, but within the church itself when that is necessary.²⁵

Finally, we present two attempts to adapt Two Kingdoms thought by amending and adding to it. *Helmut Thielicke* finds both Luther's theology of two governances and its misuse in Two Kingdoms doctrine essentially lacking something. The missing dimension is the New Testament concept of eschatology. The Two Kingdoms, he says, should not be seen side by side, but rather as two aeons in tandem. Our aeon is constantly being challenged and called into question by the one to come, which is already among us. What we have called Two Kingdoms, that is, church and state, are nothing more than "... emergency measures God has taken on behalf of our stricken world".²⁶ Thus the coincidence of Two Kingdoms among us today is not to be interpreted as a continuing, permanent simultaneity. In actual fact, the Two Kingdoms succeed one another, and their eschatological tension must be maintained, so that no one becomes too comfortable with the present arrangement.

This eschatological perspective makes all ethics and theology "... an emergency discipline following upon the fall".²⁷ All orders, including the Two Kingdoms, belong to the fallen world, and are ambiguous. They are not only placed here by God and directed at the fallen world for its care; they are also expressive of the fallen nature of the world. This represents a new concept of "orders", different from that of Luther. It relativizes both church *and* state as orders, and throws us from Romans 13 and Mark 12:13-17 back to the Sermon on the Mount as a more authentic arbiter of Christian ethics. Here we find the eschatological imperative and the unrefracted call to love the neighbour.

American theologians *Eric Gritsch* and *Robert Jenson* go further than any in dismissing the relevance of the inherited Two Kingdoms tradition to today's political and cultural situation.

The doctrine of "two kingdoms" or "realms" cannot be directly applied to modern problems of political ethics, for the political entities it discusses no longer exist... What must be done is to interpret the

two kingdoms doctrine as a historical expression of Luther's call for radical faith, and of Lutheranism's basic ethical attitude, and to build a new Lutheran political ethic in this interpretation.²⁸

They observe that the Reformation was as much a political as a spiritual event, and at the time the concept of two governances, or Two Kingdoms, was politically energizing, serving to bring about massive and radical changes, most of them positive and liberating (at least to part of the population) in the realm of public organization and policy. This, however, is no longer the case because today we do not think eschatologically or in terms of political or spiritual change.

If it loses its eschatological reference, the unity of God's two kingdoms is lost; for this unity lay in a common final goal. The two kingdoms then cease to be poles of historic unrest and become instead static compartments of self-interest. The two kingdoms becomes a sorting principle.²⁹

Our political situation today is vastly different, they say, from the time of Reformation. Then, people were locked into their roles, positions, and stations of life; today, all are "princes" in a democratic world. This applies to all forms of modern government, for even totalitarian states try to live by the fiction of democracy, which can rise up to turn against their true aims and colours.

Nevertheless, we have to realize that no matter what our personal conclusions about the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, throughout the world in all systems of rule church and state, inner and outer person, sacred and secular, personal and public realm, are in fact separate and distinct. This is not something which any church can sanction. Here again there is no middle ground: if any authority, whether it be church or state, technology or culture, is permitted to push God out of its realm, then we are on the slippery slope to absolute privatization of the individual. But here the individual shrinks into a dimensionless point and loses reality. If private religion is religion that can be counted on not to interfere in public life, then it is self-delusion, and occupies no real ground, for all parts of life are "public" in some sense.

In the task of recovering a sense of religious involvement in public life, Lutheranism is uniquely advantaged in its recognition "... that all labour for the public good is service to God, even when it leads into profound moral ambiguity; and that no

such labour will lack its fulfillment, the god thus served being the same God who promises to bring all things together into his final community.”³⁰

Finally, Luther’s interpretation of political obedience to God through the tension between law and gospel, clarifies the task of political renewal.

The great problem has always been to meet God in the political without deifying the state. . . . But if *one* God rules through all power *but in more than one mode*, then he meets us in the political arena, and there tests and exercises faith, without having to be identified with the sovereignties through whom he rules.³¹

Conclusion

It seems that any discussion of faith and politics in general, and of a doctrine such as the Two Kingdoms in particular, will generate more questions than answers. With this in mind, we conclude with a few affirmations and a lot of questions. To begin with, the history of the use and abuse of this doctrine shows the political naïveté of the church, its readiness to act selfishly in its own self-interest, and its inability or unwillingness to deal seriously with Romans 13, Mark 12:13–17, and the Sermon on the Mount. It demonstrates the need to contextualize theology in each generation rather than seeing it as normative for all time. The history of Two Kingdoms thought and practise shows that Christian faith and identity are not conserved by repeating old doctrines unexamined. And it shows the need to take *power* into consideration in any theological discussion.

We learn that the struggle between God and Satan, good and evil, is always with us, and as Solzhegnitsyn has accurately observed, the line between good and evil cuts through the heart of each individual person, just as surely as it cuts through the political and spiritual kingdoms.

The doctrine of Two Kingdoms grew out of the politics and theology of the Lutheran reformation. In its development and transmission it became deeply flawed and was abused by self-interest — a not uncommon development in every tradition. We would agree with those who observe that all religious traditions operate with some form of Two Kingdoms theology. Some sort of theory of two governances seems necessary for the public proclamation of the Gospel and for the living of an

ethically public life. The question of legitimacy in the political realm arises in all traditions.

The Canadian situation is one in which, to use Streiter's categories, we enjoy a "critical/constructive" and "critical/transformational" scenario. That is, the powers that be are essentially trying to achieve justice, or if they err, are open to criticism. With this in mind and aware of the church's mandate to proclaim the Gospel in a pluralistic society, we pose the following questions:

1. How does one cooperate with the power of God publicly? What are our human limitations?
2. How do we best care for the weaker members of society?
3. How does the church achieve true independence from the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the world?
4. How do we best overcome the compartmentalization of the churches' institutional life into kerygma, leitourgia, koinonia, and diakonia?
5. How do we reverse the shift, perceived by many, from public responsibility to narrowly-conceived diakonia within the churches — our "cocooning"?
6. How do we recover the churches' positive function of legitimization in public life, without slipping back into the offenses described in AC XXVIII?
7. How do we recover the churches' function of sensitizing the conscience with regard to the abuses we see in public life?
8. How do we recover and encourage the churches' public witness through suffering?
9. By what rules will our community live? And who will decide?
10. What are today's demons? What is the nature and the form of the struggle against evil in our society today?
11. Of what use can the theology of Two Kingdoms or two governances be in interpreting and ministering in a pluralistic society today? In proclaiming Christ in such a society?

Notes

- ¹ A longer version of this paper was presented at the May 1993 meeting of the Commission on Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches as part of their exploration of the topic "Living and Proclaiming Christ in a Religiously Pluralistic Society".
- ² Eric Gritsch & Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 179.

- 3 Trutz Rendtdorff, in *Lutheran Churches: Salt or Mirror of Society?*, edited by Ulrich Duchrow (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, 1977) 49.
- 4 *The Book of Concord*, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 38.
- 5 Ibid. 81-83.
- 6 Duchrow, *Lutheran Churches*, 12.
- 7 Gritsch & Jenson, *Lutheranism*, 179.
- 8 Duchrow, *Lutheran Churches*, 31.
- 9 Quoted in *ibid.*, 87.
- 10 Ibid. 80.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 John Stumme, "Interpreting the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Dialog*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1988, 277.
- 14 Ibid. 278.
- 15 Ibid. 279.
- 16 Ibid. 281.
- 17 Rendtdorff, in Duchrow, *Lutheran Churches*, 51.
- 18 Ibid. 53.
- 19 Ibid. 56.
- 20 Ibid. 57.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Robert Benne and Carl Braaten, "Two Kingdoms as Social Doctrine," *Dialog*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1984, 211.
- 23 Roy Enquist, "Two Kingdoms and the American Future," *Dialog*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1987, 114.
- 24 Thomas Streiter, "Two Kingdoms and Governances Thinking for Today's World," *Dialog*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1987, 205.
- 25 Ibid. 212.
- 26 Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics, Volume I: Foundations*, translated by John Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 373.
- 27 Ibid. 381.
- 28 Gritsch & Jenson, *Lutheranism*, 184.
- 29 Ibid. 187.
- 30 Ibid. 190.
- 31 Ibid.